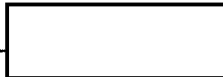




**STRATEGIC WARNING STAFF**  
**Room 1C925, Pentagon**


4 April 1980

**Memo For**



**A/NIO/W**

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Per your conversation   
attached is all of the correspondence  
on Afghanistan that the SWS sent to  
your office.

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MORI/CDF  
Pages 2-7

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**Strategic Warning Staff**  
Washington, D.C. 20301

S-0033/SWS

10 August 1979

MEMORANDUM FOR: National Intelligence Officer for Warning 25X1  
FROM : [REDACTED]  
: Doug MacEachin, Director, SWS  
SUBJECT : Soviet Options in Afghanistan

1. We believe that the Soviets must choose between one of the following three general courses of action in Afghanistan.

a. Continue the present course of providing material support, advisors and technicians, but refrain from committing Soviet combat units. (Possibly at the same time continuing to seek a political solution.)

b. Commit a limited amount of Soviet combat forces, sufficient to insure at least the security of Kabul and its immediate area, and perhaps a few other key centers.

c. Commit large combat forces for the purpose of inflicting major military defeats on the insurgent forces and recapturing much of the territory now in rebel hands.

2. Like most other community analysts, we believe Moscow views the last option as undesirable both in terms of practical military considerations and the political consequences that it would entail. We believe there is a strong likelihood, however, that the Soviets will undertake the second option, and probably in the near future. We believe they must consider that if no additional military force is introduced at least to the Kabul area the USSR faces the likelihood of being forced to evacuate its mission from Afghanistan. For reasons discussed below and also in the attached memo [REDACTED] we believe that Moscow will view the consequences of such a development as worse than the political costs of introducing limited combat forces of their own and will be willing to gamble that further escalation can be contained. Once having undertaken the increase in their military ante, however, the Soviets are likely to find themselves being drawn to the larger operation despite whatever resolve they might have to avoid it. 25X1

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3. We have no concrete evidence that the Soviets are now preparing for or have decided upon a move of even limited combat formations. We nevertheless believe that the case is sufficiently strong to warrant the issuance of an Alert Memorandum. Although there are divided views in the Community on this issue, waiting until there is clear evidence to resolve the difference of opinion among intelligence analysts may rule out the Intelligence Community's ability to provide anything more than "tactical" warning of the first movement of Soviet troops to Afghanistan. If, as we believe, the most likely form of initial military intervention is through the airlift of special combat units, the first may be on their way to or landing in Afghanistan before we can report unequivocally that the intervention option has been chosen. We believe the Alert Memorandum should be the vehicle for stating the case because its use clearly indicates the Community's intent to "warn" as opposed to "report."

#### Situation Now Confronted By Soviets In Afghanistan

4. Soviet military support to the Taraki-Amin regime already has gone about as far as it can short of direct action by Soviet combat units. The military momentum of the insurgency continues to grow, however, and unless it is at least halted -- preferably reversed -- the Soviet-backed Marxist government is likely to be militarily overthrown. The chance for a Soviet-engineered change in the Kabul government which could both protect Soviet interest and at the same time defuse the insurgency appears to have been overtaken by events, if indeed there ever was a realistic prospect for carrying it off.

5. The DRA army units in Kabul have so far maintained their loyalty to the Taraki regime. These forces have squelched the most serious uprising from within the Kabul garrisons, and as long as no further erosion in loyalty occurs it is likely that they would be able to continue to keep Kabul secure. The events of 5 August, however, clearly demonstrate that the Kabul-area forces are not immune from the defections that have been taking place elsewhere in the army. As the ring of insurgent forces draws closer to Kabul, defeatism is likely to spread, and the Army leaders may start to ponder their long term future. The Soviets must at least consider the possibility of another, more serious uprising, occurring with little or no warning, which could confront them with a fait accompli and in effect eliminate whatever options they still have.

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6. In sum, it must be evident to the Soviets that unless they inject some additional military strength their investment in Afghanistan is likely to go under, and there is at least a growing possibility that this could happen with unexpected suddenness.

Soviets Faced With Choosing "Least Bad" Option

7. The Soviets doubtless recognize that they would be pilloried by much of the rest of the world if they sent combat units into Afghanistan, and they would have to consider that taking such a step would damage the chances for Congressional ratification of the SALT II treaty. Moreover, Moscow would have to be concerned that introduction of even small forces -- a few battalions or regiments, for example -- would deepen the commitment to what could grow into an open-ended military operation.

8. On the other hand, the likely consequences of not sending in combat units go far beyond replacement of a client government by a hostile one in an area which, although on the USSR border, has no great strategic significance.

-- Moscow will not be able to represent the result as anything less than a forced eviction by a native insurgency that is not even well organized.

-- There is no graceful way out. Evacuation of the Soviet mission in Kabul could not be portrayed as anything other than abandonment of the Taraki regime.

-- The manner in which these events would have been brought about would add to the aura of the growing strength of Islamic militancy in the region. The latter may be of even more concern to the Soviets than the particular situation of Afghanistan itself.

-- The Soviets would have shown themselves unable or unwilling to use their military power even to save a client government in a country sharing a common border with the USSR and in a situation in which there is little chance of direct confrontation with another major military power.

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9. In this situation, psychological factors and the Soviet big power self-image is likely to influence the decision making process at least as much if not more than the political considerations. While it is true that Soviet public statements of support for the Afghan regime have been low key of late, it is nevertheless also true that strong public statements have been made by the highest level of Soviet leadership, as is discussed in the attached memorandum.

10. Moreover, the cause and effect relationship of the "no-action" alternative appears more certain than in the case of the intervention option. The fall of the Taraki regime with all it would entail seems virtually unavoidable if the Soviets commit no combat elements. On the other hand, the Soviets may persuade themselves that they can insert some combat forces without succumbing to pressures for escalation. Insofar as SALT II is concerned, the Soviets can have no assurance that the U.S. ratification process will result in something they can accept, no matter what they do in Afghanistan. As regards world opinion, the Soviets have shown the ability to live with criticism in the past, and it is problematical which form of world impression would be more unacceptable to them -- that of a bellicose power or that of a power unable to use its military force in directly contiguous areas.

11. Commitment of troops to the defense of Kabul also would at least have some benefits to weigh against the costs. As long as Kabul is secure, the Soviets can at least maintain the argument that their client continues to govern Afghanistan and that the USSR is living up to its commitment. Moscow would have demonstrated its willingness to use its power. The Soviets also would have bought some time to find ways to defuse the situation, perhaps continuing to seek a cast of characters which might provide the basis for the hoped-for political solution.

12. At least some Soviet leaders probably will continue to argue that all this is merely rationalization and that sending in combat forces -- albeit limited -- only commits Moscow further down the road to a large scale military occupation of Afghanistan. They will argue that commitment of limited combat forces would offer at best a holding action. Ultimately, the Soviets probably would confront pressure to increase further their military commitment or face an evacuation made all the more distasteful by the fact that the involvement will by then have grown.

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13. While we tend to agree with this assessment of the likely consequences of a "limited" intervention, we doubt that Soviet leaders holding this view will be able to withstand the combination of arguments regarding consequences of no action and rationalizations that the escalation can be contained.

#### Indications And Collection

14. The airlift of a Soviet regiment (2,000 or so troops) without much equipment other than infantry weapons would require on the order of 130 flights of AN-12 aircraft. These could originate from almost any part of the Soviet Union where there are ground force units with ready access to an airfield. The most likely source for the troops is an airborne division, but they could be drawn from motorized rifle divisions as well. If the troops are to be airlifted, there is no great advantage in drawing them from the part of the USSR closest to Afghanistan. The Soviets might elect to draw troops from the Western USSR, keeping those in the Afghan border area in reserve for further contingencies.

15. A complete airborne division with all of its weapons and equipment would require on the order of 600 AN-12 flights. (The number of flights would of course vary depending on the type of aircraft used and the amount of equipment brought in.) This would be more easily detected and would mean that the likely origins of the troops would be more limited in number.

16. There is a good chance that if the Soviets do elect to bring in combat troops they will try to do it -- at least in the initial stages -- in as low key a manner as possible. As long as they control Bagram airfield the Soviets can move in their own troops incrementally. The civil air fleet -- Aeroflot -- is used to effect the rotation of some 120,000 Soviet conscripts in East Europe twice annually. Using Aeroflot aircraft to bring in troops and using military aircraft only for major equipment would enable the Soviets to mute somewhat the telltale sizes of military intervention at least until a substantial number of troops were in the country.

17. For these reasons, it may be difficult to obtain much advance warning that the Soviets have in fact undertaken to introduce combat elements into Afghanistan.

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18. If the Soviets intend to use combat forces in Afghanistan for more than static defense they will need to provide them with some mobility -- possibly substantial helicopter support. It is also possible that the initial form of increased Soviet military support may be to provide Soviet-piloted helicopter units -- both transport and attack. That alone, however, is unlikely to have much effect and if whole Soviet helicopter units do start appearing in Afghanistan it would -- in our view -- mean commitment of ground combat troops probably is in the offing.

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the Afghan border. We have no assurance, however, that we will identify the initial preparations for movement of Soviet combat troops to Afghanistan.

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